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## **Introduction**

Back in 2014 Helen and I took over the editorship for *Social Work Education: The International Journal*. In our first editorial (McLaughlin and Scholar, 2014). we set our vision for the journal within the title as 'Advancing excellence in social work education'. Now as we come to the end of our tenure it is important to revisit our original vision, what we have achieved and what we have not! You can learn as much, and sometimes more from those things that do not work out and those that do. We all also wish to share some reflections on developments over the years and some more concerning trends. Back in 2014 we claimed that, 'in order for the journal to be considered as excellent it needs to be regarded as such by its stakeholders: readers, potential authors, assessors, and board members (ibid., 417)'.

## **Readers**

No journal can exist without readers. The very positive news for potential authors is that the number of downloads during our editorship have increased year on year. Last year there was a 31% increase in downloads with a total of 194,811 downloads. This is nearly a 150% increase since we took over the editorship. In response to the journal's international reach over 88,315 of these were from Europe, 48,781 from the USA and Canada 44,163, 14,658 from Asia, 5,752 from Africa and 1,082 from the rest of the Americas. From this it can be seen the journal is reaching around the globe and we know the new editors are keen to develop more in African and South America.

Whilst an increase in readers is important, we would also like to think more people have been downloading the journal because of the quality of the articles and how it speaks to issues in contemporary social work education.

## **Potential Authors**

In 2019 the journal received 174 articles of the most came from the US, UK, Spain, Australia and Canada in that order. Making up the top ten countries also included New Zealand, Indonesia, Denmark, India, and joint tenth China, Ireland, Israel, Sweden and the UAE underlining the journal's international reach. The journal has also supported authors from less represented countries and for whom English is not their first language to improve their article to be publishable. The journal has also published 2 editorials with other social work journal editors to promote publications, 'publish not perish' (Robbins et al. 2016) and advice on what editor's value (McLaughlin et al. 2015).

Of particular interest to potential authors the speed at which articles appear online following acceptance has reduced from 38 days in 2014 to 11 days currently. Whilst on a scale of 1-10 where 10 totally satisfied 79 % of authors rated their satisfaction with the journal's processes between 8-10. Whilst this is good news there is obviously room for improvement.

The journal currently does not have an impact factor but is listed in the Emerging Sources Index created in 2017 making it searchable on Web of Science. It is from this source that performing journals, like ours are considered for impact factor assessment. Clarivate Analytics who complete this process provide no details as to when this would happen. In

working with the publishers, it is clear that the journal would achieve the benchmarks for a good social work impact factor. It is also important that we should thank Anna Parkinson and her team from Taylor and Francis for their expert support and ability to answer our questions!

### **Assessors**

We would like to say a big thank you to all our assessors, your hard work is paying off and we know that authors respect and benefit from your expertise and critical acumen. Authors continue to tell us how beneficial good quality feedback is in improving the quality of their article. However, this is the area that has caused us the greatest difficulties ensuring the timely completion of expert assessment of peer reviews. With the increase in article submissions it has been more difficult to find appropriately qualified assessors to review articles. So, if you are reading this and are interested in becoming a reviewer, we would encourage you to contact the new editors.

Most reviewers provide helpful challenge and expert comment to help authors to improve their work, however we still get some who provide us with one line. These reviewers are unlikely to be reused as the journal has a system of scoring reviews which gives marks on a scale of three for timeliness and also for relevance.

One of the changes that we have noted during our tenure has been the number of articles that are going for three, and sometimes more reviews. At the same time we have experienced more reviewers who do not wish to review an article after they have seen it once, despite indicating that major or minor revisions are required. As the journal attracts more and more articles this is in danger of becoming 'a perfect storm'. This position disadvantages authors who can rightly claim that they have addressed all the reviewer's comments to be then faced with a new reviewer's comments. This trend is something we are aware that other journal editors have experienced along with having to send an article out multiple times before receiving a positive response to a request for review. These factors along with the increasing submission raises the question as to whether we as an academic community are experiencing a reduction in academic citizenship whereby everyone is keen to have their article reviewed as quickly as possible, but are becoming less willing to review other people's?

All journals are always on the look-out for new reviewer's, so if *Social Work Education: The International Journal* is a journal you use and are wanting to develop your writing skills please volunteer as a reviewer and the new editors will advise you how to set up an account where you can identify the areas in which you would feel you have the expertise to contribute. All reviewers see all reviews for the same article which can be very helpful in promoting your own learning.

### **Board Members**

We would like to thank all the highly talented board members we have had the privilege to work with and we hope that those on the main board have enjoyed the annual residential meetings which have been a key feature of the journal and an excellent opportunity to reflect on progress, develop new ideas and critically engage with the journal's future, whilst also having some fun! In attending the North American Advisory Board in Orlando in 2018

we also had the surreal experience of having Goofy and other Disney characters joining our breakfast meeting! The journal also has an Australasian and Asian Advisory Boards.

We should also like to single out Graeme Simpson and Katja Nowacki for their work as book editors and Susi Mapp the recent North American Board Associate Editor for her work in helping the journal expand within North America.

### **Some Successes and Challenges**

We are proud that we have been able to continue with the tradition of two of our board members being service user representatives and that we marked the 10 year anniversary of the first special edition on service user involvement in social work education with a double special edition jointly edited by 2 service users and 2 academics which was later published as a book (McLaughlin, Duffy, McKeever and Sadd, (2018). The special editions have covered a range of topics including arts based approaches, green social work, distance learning (particularly appropriate during the current covid-19 pandemic) and social work education with minority groups and further stimulating and challenging special editions currently in process.

We also set up the student activism competition from which we received many inspiring entries from social work students across the globe. However, in the last couple of years the entries have dried up and the journal is now considering how best to relaunch this initiative. We hope that this can again become an inspiration for social work students globally capturing how they are addressing inequalities and promoting social justice.

The annual awards for the best articles have now become firmly established within the journal and we acknowledge and celebrate key research based and conceptual articles. The journal was also a sponsor of the first international social work conference in Nepal and has through SWERSA supported the completion of social work PhDs internationally.

### **Looking forward**

We believe the new editors Dr Jane Fenton (already a board member) and Dr Richard Ingram from the University of Dundee have the vision and commitment to take the journal forward and ensure that it continues to expand its reach, but just as importantly to continue to provide a source of excellence in social work education for all its stakeholders. So, it's 'goodbye from us and hello from them!'

Hugh McLaughlin and Helen Scholar

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